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PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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SUBJECT: Senegal: Protest Against Gaza Bombardment

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On January 2, 2009 The Association of Muslim students (AMS) of Senegal staged a small but vociferous demonstration against the bombings in Gaza. The demonstration took place on the campus of the University of Dakar and was attended by approximately 1,000 students. The leaders of AMS indicated that they will initiate a campaign of street demonstrations starting January 9 and are prepared to disobey any GOS decision to ban such protests. End Summary.

Low attendance

¶2. (SBU) The demonstration did not attract a huge crowd, as most of the students who attended the Friday prayer at the University Mosque did not stay for the protest. Despite much publicity prior to the event in the local media, non-student participation was minimal.

Fiery rhetoric

¶3. (SBU) The demonstration was co-sponsored by students from Mauritania, Morocco, and Mali. The leaders of the Association of Mauritanian and Malian students made remarks for the group. They condemned rich Muslim countries that "remain inactive before these violations" and Hosni Mubarak, President of Egypt, was portrayed as the accomplice of Israel in making a blockade possible. Mansour NDiaye, the leader of the Senegalese Muslim students, called on President Wade to break diplomatic ties with Israel "which has acted beyond the limits of decency." He added that his organization will institute a program named "Fridays for Palestine" with demonstrations to be initiated from various mosques. He also announced the creation of a task force including local Islamic organizations to coordinate their actions.

Opposition leaders condemn

¶4. (SBU) On January 4, Senegalese National TV aired interviews of senior opposition leaders who strongly condemned Israel for its disproportionate reaction against the rocket attacks by Hamas. Opposition leader, Abdoulaye Bathily noted that such an intervention begets only more terrorism, while his colleague, Moustapha Niasse, President of the Alliance of Progress, indicated that this conflict put in context, was an extension of the North/South conflict. He further added that the Palestinians and the Israelis must respect each other's sovereignty and strongly urged the Senegalese government to avoid breaking diplomatic ties with Israel.

Wade plans to visit Gaza

¶5. (SBU) In a television interview, President Wade said that his calls for a ceasefire had not been heeded, adding that, "Israel made a mistake by launching a ground offensive." Expanding on the idea, he added, "Israel could be bogged down and left with the annexation of Gaza as the sole option." He announced that in his capacity as President of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) he will travel to Jordan to discuss the matter with the King whom he considers "open-minded," to Egypt to meet with President Mubarak, to Damascus and Beirut to meet Hamas leaders and finally to Israel and

Gaza.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Senegal's overwhelmingly Muslim population has so far only verbally condemned Israel's actions in Gaza without staging mass organized protest as in other Muslim countries. The Association of Muslim students, in cooperation with Muslim NGOs, is seeking to spark a more hard-line stance for Senegal. If the movement they have initiated gathers momentum, it could lead to strong pressure from grassroots Islamic organizations and members of civil society to sever diplomatic ties with Israel. End comment.

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